

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE NEW TESTAMENT

First Baptist Church Dandridge – Fall 2024

Dr. Justin Terrell

justin@fbcdandridge.org

The Gospel of John

1. **Authorship:** Like the Synoptic Gospels, the author of the Gospel of John (the Fourth Gospel) is anonymous. However, we find internal and external evidence that sheds light on who wrote this important work.
 - a. **Internal Evidence:** Unlike the Synoptics, the writer of this Gospel offers a glimpse of his identity. In John 21:20, 24, he writes, *“Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and said, ‘Lord who is it that is going to betray you?’ This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.”* The identification of *“the disciple whom Jesus loved”* is a theme throughout this Gospel.
 - **13:23** – *“One of the disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at the table at Jesus’ side.”*
 - **19:26** – *“When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!”*
 - **20:2** – *“So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.’”*
 - **21:2** – *“Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who had also leaned back against him during the supper and had said, ‘Lord who is it that is going to betray you?’”*

These descriptions seem to indicate that *“the disciple whom Jesus loved”* was one of the twelve disciples, and perhaps an “insider” among the twelve, someone Jesus had a closer relationship with. As Beale mentions, since the Synoptics record these same events and only mention the twelve disciples with Jesus (e.g. the Last Supper), it reasons that the *“disciple whom Jesus loved”* was among the twelve (Beale, 126). It can’t be Peter, because Peter is mentioned being with him (21:2). However, the Synoptics portray Peter and John as close friends, always together. Carson adds, *“That he is one of the seven who go fishing in chapter 21 and, by implication, is not Peter, Thomas, or Nathanael, suggests he is one of the sons of Zebedee...[but] of the sons of Zebedee [James and John], he cannot be James, since James was the first of the apostolic band to be martyred”* (Carson, 237). Carson also points out that James or John isn’t mentioned by name in this Gospel, which is “exceedingly strange, unless there is some reason for it” (237). The most likely reason is that John wrote this Gospel. In addition, Guthrie points out that the phrase, *“We have seen his glory”* (1:14) is very similar to 1 John 1:1-4, “where the first person plural performs a similar function” (Guthrie, 253).

- b. **External Evidence:** According to the early church father Irenaeus, "John the disciple of the Lord, who leaned back on his breast, published the gospel while he was a resident at Ephesus in Asia" (Eusebius, *H.E.*, III, 23). In addition, Irenaeus mentions that his source was Polycarp, who was a personal disciple of John. Another important source is Clement of Alexandria, who stated, "But that John, last of all, conscious that the outward facts had been set forth in the Gospels, was urged on by his disciples, and, divinely moved by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel" (Carson, 231). While there is some debate about its authenticity, it's noteworthy that in the Anti-Marcionite prologue to John (2nd century) the writer states that the Gospel of John was written down by Papias at the dictation of John the apostle. There are many other ancient sources that corroborate that John was the author of the Fourth Gospel.
2. **Date:** While the Synoptics were written earlier (AD 50s-60s), John's Gospel appears to be written later. One bit of evidence is that he seems to know how Peter will die (John 21:18-19), giving the impression it was written after Peter's death (AD 64-65). In addition, there is no mention or prophecy of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (AD 70), implying that a significant time had passed since being destroyed (Beale, 127). Giving the fact that John lived longer than the other apostles (~AD 100), he most likely wrote toward the end of the first century, which is why most conservative scholars have it dated in the AD 80s-90s. There is also evidence that John's Gospel was being used in the early second century, as a fragment (Rylands Library Papyrus P52, \mathfrak{P}^{52}) was discovered in Egypt, dated near AD 125.
3. **Audience:** If Irenaeus and others are correct that John wrote from Ephesus, we can reason that he was writing to dispersed Jews and regional Gentiles toward the end of the first century. Köstenberger notes, "John's Gospel, like the other canonical Gospels, was likely written for all Christians rather than for readers in only one geographical location. If so, John most likely wrote with Diaspora Jews, proselytes, and other Gentiles in mind without intending to limit his audience exclusively to any one group" (Köstenberger, 301).
4. **Purpose**
- **Evangelism:** John states his primary purpose in 20:30-31, "*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*" Therefore, John was writing to evangelize unbelievers.
 - **Edification:** Others have noticed that John also serves to edify believers. Köstenberger notes, "John's Gospel seems to presuppose an audience that is already familiar with Scripture since it contains detailed instructions for believers, especially in the second half of the Gospel" (304).
 - **Specific Issues:** Based on a later date for John's Gospel, some have theorized that John wrote his Gospel in response to the aftermath of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (AD 70). According to Köstenberger, the destruction of the temple became a major question among

Jews and Jewish Christians. How could Jesus allow the sacred temple to be destroyed? Why would God allow this? In response, John wrote to describe Jesus as the fulfillment of the Jerusalem temple, how Jesus is the embodiment of all that the temple was intended to be (sacrifice, prayer, worship, meet with God, learning, comfort and peace, etc.). Kruger notes, "This is why John places the cleansing of the temple at the beginning of his Gospel (whereas it occurs at the end of the synoptics)...this redemptive-historical perspective on Jesus as the new temple fits quite well with the end of the first century – 80s or 90s – when Jews and Jewish Christians would have been reflecting upon the meaning of AD 70" (Kruger, 118). Others have mentioned that John may have been writing to those confused by the early stages of docetic Gnosticism, where Jesus' humanity would have been minimized in favor of his spiritual nature, which is why John makes clear that Jesus was fully human and fully God.

5. Structure

a. **Prologue:** (1:1-18) – John begins his Gospel unlike the others in that he reveals Jesus' eternal nature as God and his incarnate nature as man. According to Kruger, "There is little doubt that the prologue is the most famous section of the Gospel of John, if not the entire New Testament" (Kruger, 121). Jesus is presented as the divine "Logos" ("Word"), which is an expression of God's power, wisdom, and salvation. In essence, Jesus is the human version of God, the living Word.

- **John 1:1-3, 14** – *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth"*

b. **The Book of Signs** (1:19-12:50)

- **Seven Miracles:** According to John, Jesus performed countless miracles (21:25), but the Holy Spirit inspired him to record seven specific miracles in the first half of his Gospel. Seven is a number representing completeness, and John wants us to see how Jesus is completely God. The miracles increase in intensity: (1) Turns water into wine; (2) heals a nobleman's son; (3) heals a crippled man; (4) feeds 5000; (5) walks on water; (6) heals a man born blind; (7) raises Lazarus from the dead.
- **Seven "I Am" Statements:** After establishing Jesus' divinity by reporting seven miracles, John further identifies Jesus' nature and purpose by recording seven "I Am" statements. Jesus states: (1) I am the bread of Life; (2) I am the light of the world; (3) I am the door of the sheep; (4) I am the resurrection and the life; (5) I am the good shepherd; (6) I am the way, the truth, and the life; (7) I am the true vine. Some of these statements directly correspond with the miracles (e.g., Feeding the 5000/I Am the Bread of Life; Jesus raises Lazarus/I Am the Resurrection).

- c. **The Book of Passion/Glory** (13:1-20:31) – After using roughly half of the book to present the three years of Jesus' earthly ministry, John uses the last half of the book on the final week of Jesus' life, including his betrayal, suffering, death, burial, and resurrection. Unlike the Synoptics, John gives extended details, such as the Jesus washing the disciples' feet, the Upper Room discourse, Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, and additional details about Jesus and Pilate.
- d. **Epilogue** (21:1-25) – The epilogue concludes the Gospel with Jesus restoring Peter to ministry, along with Jesus' words concerning John ("*the disciple whom Jesus loved*").

6. Characteristics

- a. **Jesus, the Jewish Messiah:** A major theme in John's Gospel is how the Jewish people rejected their own Messiah, a fellow Jew that God sent to be their suffering servant. John emphasizes their rejection (1:11), while showing other prominent Jews like Nicodemus receiving him in faith (John 3). Jesus identified himself as "*I Am*," the covenant name of God (8:58).
- b. **Old Testament Allusions:** In John's attempt to reveal Jesus as Israel's Messiah, he records several different Old Testament figures and institutions that Jesus came to fulfill or replace (e.g., temple, vine, light of the world, tabernacle, serpent, Passover, etc.).
- c. **Misunderstandings:** No Gospel better reveals how Jesus was misunderstood by the Jewish people (e.g., the religious leaders and the temple; Nicodemus and the new birth; the Samaritan woman and living water; etc.).
- d. **The Holy Spirit:** John's Gospel contains more teaching about the Holy Spirit than the others. Nicodemus learned how the Spirit is necessary in all phases of salvation (John 3). Jesus explains to the woman at the well how true worship is in "Spirit and truth" (John 4). In Jesus' farewell discourse, he gives the fullest description of the Spirit's work anywhere in Scripture (John 14-16).